



South Coast Air Quality Management District

21865 Copley Drive, Diamond Bar, CA 91765-4182
(909) 396-2000 • www.aqmd.gov

FAXED: MARCH 10, 2006

March 10, 2006

Mr. Ronald K. Running
City of Hemet
Planning Department
445 East Florida Avenue
Hemet, CA 92543

Dear Mr. Running:

Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for Professional Development Center (February 16, 2006)

As noted by the lead agency, the Hemet Unified School District circulated the draft Mitigated Negative Declaration on July 8, 2005. In response to the 07/08/05 MND, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) submitted a comment letter dated August 2, 2005. In the August 2, 2005 comment letter, the SCAQMD requested that the lead agency, the Hemet Unified School District, conduct a health risk assessment to characterize the risks posed by the 90 buses and recirculate the Mitigated Negative Declaration with that information. This request was made because the SCAQMD believes it is improper to defer an environmental analysis for a project to some indeterminate time in the future. Further, this approach precludes the public from reviewing and commenting on a potentially significant adverse environmental impact from the project or mitigation measures that may be identified for the project.

The SCAQMD appreciates the fact that the Hemet Unified School District operates seven compressed natural gas buses and is committed to converting additional buses as funding becomes available, however, these actions do not relieve the school district of the requirement to conduct an appropriate environmental analysis, an HRA, prior to the release of the MND and project approval.

In the lead agency's response to the SCAQMD August 2, 2005 comment letter, the Hemet Unified School District states that it will "set an appropriate performance standard" as part of the School District's mitigation strategy and implement mitigation measures necessary to meet the standard. Since the lead agency does not establish a time-frame for preparing an HRA, this could occur after the project is completed. In this situation, if impacts are significant, there is no guarantee that the mitigation measures can reduce impacts to the nearby sensitive receptors to less than significant.

The SCAQMD continues to believe that it is inappropriate and inconsistent with CEQA to continue to defer the HRA to some indeterminate time in the future and again requests that the lead agency conduct an HRA and recirculate the MND showing the methodology and results of the risk assessment along with appropriate mitigation measures as necessary. The original SCAQMD comment is attached and incorporated herein by reference.

The SCAQMD is aware that CEQA does not require a lead agency to respond to comments submitted for a negative declaration, but again requests written responses to all comments contained herein prior to the certification of the Final Mitigated Negative Declaration. The SCAQMD would be happy to work with the Lead Agency to address these issues and any other questions that may arise. Please contact Charles Blankson, Ph.D., Air Quality Specialist – CEQA Section, at (909) 396-3304 if you have any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely

Steve Smith, Ph.D.
Program Supervisor, CEQA Section
Planning, Rule Development & Area Sources

Attachment

SS: CB
RVC060228-03
Control Number

1. **Health Risk Assessment:** On page 34 of the DMND it is stated that 95 buses associated with the proposed project that emit diesel particulates would potentially result in a significant air quality impact prior to application of mitigation measures. Mitigation measure #2 on page 35 states, "A health risk study would be performed to characterize risk from buses associated with the project If substantial health risk impacts are found to occur, mitigation measures such as diesel particulate filters ... would be applied to reduce the health impacts to less than significant levels."

The SCAQMD continues to believe that this approach taken by the lead agency regarding exposure to toxic air contaminants improperly defers to some undefined future date the quantification of a health risk assessment (HRA). Similarly, the lead agency improperly defers substantial mitigation measures such as particulate filters, etc., to some undefined future date. This precludes the public from reviewing and commenting on the HRA and proposed mitigation measures. Further, if the identified mitigation measures do not reduce potential significant adverse cancer risk impacts to less than significance, this impact has not been disclosed to the public and the public will have no recourse since the project will already have been approved.

The SCAQMD requests that the lead agency revise the DMND by performing an HRA for the proposed project, including the results in the DMND and, assuming impacts are not significant or can be mitigated to insignificance, recirculate the DMND for public review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15073.5.

The lead agency is referred to the methodology prepared by SCAQMD as guidance for performing an air toxics health risk analysis of truck emissions. This methodology can be accessed at the SCAQMD website at: www.aqmd.gov/ceqa/handbook/diesel_analysis.doc under Health Risk Assessment Guidance. As noted by the lead agency, should the study disclose adverse health risks to the nearby residents, the lead agency should identify measures to reduce those risks. If significant impacts cannot be mitigated to insignificance, the project does not qualify for a MND.

2. **Number of Buses:** The lead agency states on page 34 that the school district would operate 95 buses to and from the project site. This number is inconsistent with the number of buses in the project description, 90. Further, Table 13 appears to indicate that there will only be 70 bus trips per day. Please indicate which number is correct and revise the analysis accordingly.
3. **Vehicle Fleet Mix:** SCAQMD staff has reviewed the URBEMIS output in Appendix B and notes that for operational emissions, the model's default fleet mix is used. The problem with using default fleet mix for a project such as the proposed project is that the percentage of bus trips is substantially less than the percentage of bus trips reflected in Table 13 on page 63. The default fleet mix should be revised to better reflect the actual vehicle fleet associated with the proposed project.

4. **Localized Impacts:** Consistent with the SCAQMD's environmental justice program and policies, the SCAQMD recommends that the lead agency also evaluate localized air quality impacts. SCAQMD staff recommends that for this project and for future projects, the lead agency undertake the localized analysis to ensure that all feasible measures are implemented should the analysis demonstrate that construction NO_x and CO emissions are significant. The methodology for conducting the localized significance thresholds analysis can be found on the SCAQMD website at: www.aqmd.gov/ceqa/handbook/LST/LST.html.